

DIDACTIC MASCULINE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at bringing into focus George Bernard Shaw's (British 1856–1950) tendency to represent dramatic female characters dominated by dramatic male characters in his theatrical practice. Also in the way to do that the researcher highlights the kind of dramatic therapy techniques and treatment Shaw's female character receives exploring the different ways in which male dominates female. In order to do that, the research paper introduces a play-text, where the main female character was nursed by a dominant male figure. This dramatic text is selected carefully to serve the purposes of this study. The descriptive analytical methodology is selected to sever the purposes of this research paper and to picture the way female characters are commanded by male characters.

KEYWORDS: *Gender, Drama, Playwright, Feminist Exploration & Shavian*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Play

Shaw's *Fanny's First Play* (1911), this text was taken from a printed volume containing the plays "*Misalliance*" (1909–1910), "*The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*" (1910), "*Fanny's First Play*" (1911), and the essay "*A Treatise on Parents and Children*") is selected as a model where the portrayal of gender designed by Shaw in dramatic practice giving the superiority to male as the base for human existence.

Commercially speaking and according to the theatrical practice at that time, *Fanny's First Play* had the longest first run of any of Shaw's plays. Shaw's first major success came, in 1911 with *Misalliance*" (1909–1910), "*The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910), but with the production of *Fanny's First Play* in particular he got his first public breakthrough. Even though, the playwright called this successful play "a *potboiler*" (1) meaning [pot-boiler]. That is to say, the playwright himself assessed his work as something made very quickly and with low quality. However the audiences "of the period" found the production delightful for its ironic style of theatrical criticism and contemporary social concerns (Henderson 1956: Century 605). The only person who does not feel comfortable with this play was the playwright himself.

In addition to that, *Fanny's First Play* is Shaw's only drama that presents the play-within-a-play construction (Morgan 1972: 4), and the only one to deal with the actual writing of plays. It is the second one which depicts a woman as a writer (Mrs. Clandon, in *You Never Can Tell* (1897), is the first one). Furthermore, it could be described as a direct unprincipled comedy with layer upon layer of satire frame building up to the point where virtually everything anyone says has one or more unkind-funny remarks attached .

Yet, as with the Renaissance Shakespeare's comedy (which is not surprising as Shaw resembles himself to Shakespeare) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/96), the audience are fully aware and conscious here of the

controlling hand of the dramatist over the play-text which itself is about dramatic structure and composition. The question that relates this play-text to the main theme of this study is, why in his only play to consider the playwriting, staging, and criticism of drama, should Shaw choose to mask the identity of the playwright and portray a young female dramatist who herself does not wish to be known by the reviewers as the author of the play they attend?

Shaw, here, depicts the playwright character as a young woman- a figure who acknowledges his literary (masculine/paternity) nursing as a significant influence on her own professional development at the same time that he projects a version of his younger, less mature self-autobiography onto her. Significantly, Shaw sets the frame action, or technically speaking the point of attack, on Fanny's birthday. In other words, at the same time that one becomes conscious of her nativity, hears of the creation of her first play, both of which are being celebrated simultaneously with its premiere production. The audience can thus associate its own first viewing of Shaw's latest piece with the nested images of birthing and creativity in Fanny and her play—all generated by Shaw, all metaphorically related.

1.2 Significance of the Study

A number of factors contribute to making this study significant. However, the primary significance of this study rested on the broad topic of gender. It is going to uncover and reveal Shaw's female character as a public figure (author). Also, the study points out based gender roles and behaviour, male characters attitudes towards public Victorian woman. In addition to that, the research paper identifies the ways female dramatic charters were defined by ideologists such as George Bernard Shaw.

1.3 Methodology of the Study

This study is analytical; text analysis is used based on didactics principles. The major references of the study are *Fanny's First Play* and Shaw's theatrical background. It consisted of analysing a group of Victorian dramatic figures with regard to the theme of gender and gender role behaviours of the characters.

1.4 Research Questions

- This study concentrated on how gender public roles (authors) were described and defined in Shaw's *Fanny's First Play*.
- What kind of gender roles did the characters have in each play?
- Once described for the characters, did the identified gender roles fall into the "conservative" realm or were the characters taking on roles outside the classical conservative categories
- Did the sex of the playwright make any difference in the character's creation?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Taking Shaw as an example, a number of different literary studies introduce Shaw's female characters in different ways, particularly after World War II. But most of them agreed that he has positive attitudes towards female. These studies, and others, which emerged during 1970 established what is known as 'feminist criticism', and exemplify the "the images of women" school: Works on images of women still predominate in the feminist criticism of classical texts. Numerous revisions of Aeschylus and Shakespeare are currently being published. There are two basic types of image: positive roles, which depict women as independent, intelligent and even heroic; and a surplus of misogynistic roles commonly identified as the bitch, the

Witch, the Vamp and the Virgin / Goddess. (Case 1988: 6). Here, it is suggested that the images of women in classic drama are of two kinds positive and negative, which equally could be adapted to modern drama, as he doesn't mention anything about her image in the Victorian era. The positive image of women presents a female who has been forced to prove her worthiness within the stringent boundaries of a male dominated-existence. This presentation often accompanied with an explanation of how women traditionally had been regarded as inferior to men physically and intellectually, and thus narrowed her roles in society

With reference to Shaw's representation of women, the feminism criticism proposes that he has a positive understanding of women of his time. This is evident, for instance, in the opening of an essay by Weintraub (1980) exemplifies in a perfect way the feminist criticism of Shaw to date: Unlike most dramatists since Shakespeare, 'St. Bernard,' patron saint of women's movement, as Bernard Shaw jestingly referred to himself, wrote plays for strong vital women. Often the play's central figures, his woman does not easily fall into the bitch goddess, virgin mother, whore, ingénue, nor castrating neurotic formula. His female characters generate energy and motivate action rather than merely react to forces buffeting them. When asked, how he comes to write roles for real women, he responded that he had never imagined women as different from himself. He frequently based his characterization, however, not merely on himself but on persons he knew and episodes from their lives. Until now critics have, for the most part, overlooked a very significant model for his female character development, one who contributed much of his inspiration for the strong, independent women portrayed in his later plays as well as for his royal wives-his wife (77). Evidently, a number of critics have influenced Shaw's stance, such as Barbara Bellow Watson's *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Women* (1964), *Fabian Feminist* (1977), a collection of essays edited by Rodelle Weintraub that appeared in the *Shaw Review*. This collection of studies provides the research with important information about Shaw's treatment of his female characters. In addition, the study finds out that Sonja Lorich's *Unwomanly Woman in Bernard Shaw's Drama and Her Social and political Background* (1973), and Margot Peter's *Bernard Shaw and the Actresses* (1980) tried to place Shaw's attitude towards women in its historical -intellectual context, presenting him as a progressive playwright. Watson's (1972) study could be seen as a panoramic view of Shaw's entire professional life. But it is not an in-depth analysis and it suffers at times from overgeneralization connected with an inability to provide a detailed examination of any given character, let alone presenting an authentic investigation about the position of women in Shaw's works. She wrote, 4 The Shavian career woman is many things nested in one, like a Russian wooden doll. Each of these stout painted women contains her smaller twins. Thus the career woman depicted by Shaw is an image of the great hidden potential of Woman, who is pregnant of something more than infant posterity: her grown-up self. (149) The problems with Watson's argument are obvious: Is the "Shavian career woman" also a "doll"? Can a "smaller twin" at the same time suggest "greatness"? Would this working woman generally be that and "pregnant" too? Furthermore, what about the appearance of the figure itself: the Russian toy is a domestic peasant woman, with a painted apron and handkerchief. How can this figure represent a middle-class "career woman" as Watson means the term-- a professional wage earner (as opposed to the career housewife)? Lastly, what are people to make of the continuation of this image: is there no change, no development for women, as each smaller doll is an exact replica of its holder, suggesting a generational continuity that contradicts with the suggestion of progress? The problems with Watson's metaphor are the problem with her analysis: the contradictory messages that come more closely correspond to the Shavian subtext than do her sweeping overgeneralization. Yet her groundbreaking study made a marked impact 5 on subsequent Shavian scholarship, and many works including this one, which use Watson as a touchstone. Lorichs (1973) examines the historical context of some of Shaw's major female characters and plays, and provides useful information on Victorian prostitution, marriage and divorce laws, the suffrage movement, the Salvation

Army, and the class structure of the Victorian society. In addition, the articles edited by Weintraub (1977) under the title *Fabian Feminist*, address specific historical and cultural influences on Shaw, as well as some of his impact on his society. Peter's (1980) critical biography places Shaw within his surrounding atmosphere and presents his social background in detail. It concentrates on Shaw's relations with women particularly the actresses with whom he worked throughout his professional life and the impact of these figures on his drama.

3. SHAW'S VERSUS FANNY IN THE PREFACE

With reference to Shaw's theatrical background, it is easy to figure out that he makes the connections between himself and Fanny quite obvious in the Prologue spoken by the actress/playwright, written for productions:

In childhood sunny days, I, by an aunt of mine,

Was taken--prematurely--to the pantomime.

From that time forth, each evening I would be at her:

"Take me again, dear, Auntie, to the theatre":

Twas thus I first on Shakespeare's golden page struck.

The natural result was, I got stage stuck. (347-348)

Quite obvious that much of her speech is a part of Shaw's own history. He does not only take aims at his usual targets of British hypocrisy and education of hierarchy but also represents himself in a she-dress very early in this play-text.

The preface to *Fanny's First Play*, which establishes the frame for the action that resulted from the exposition, explains expositively that *Fanny's play* is being performed privately, which was "done often enough" (357) at the time, especially by Shaw. He had to secure copyrights for plays the censor would not allow having public production according to the Victorian rules. It was first performed without giving the authors' name. That is to say, the authorship of *Fanny's First Play* was to be kept secret. However, critics soon uncovered the truth about it. It is very interesting here to refer to Fanny's father's comment on her play. He states that:

The heroine will be an exquisite Columbine, her lover a dainty Harlequin, her father a picturesque Pantaloon, and the valet who hoodwinks the father. And brings about the happiness of the lovers a grotesque but perfectly tasteful Punchinello or Mascarille or Sganarelle. (356)

The father who knows nothing of the play's content, naively in this extract, assumes that the drama will be like a harlequinade from the *commedia* tradition or the pantomime. Obviously, the connection between these two genres of drama and Shaw is quite clear. However, evidently Fanny's play avoids such traditionally preferable entertainment, which contradicts her father's previous comment, in favour of the "modern" dramaturgy that her father dislikes—a style she has acquired from theatrical contact during her Cambridge education. Also, it is observed that there is an absence of Fanny's mother who is never mentioned in the play text. The playwright Fanny is a highly educated woman sent to Cambridge by her father who has resided for many years in Venice and is thus unaware of the changes in education brought about by the emergence of Socialism and other revolutionary influences at the university in England. Fanny has adopted Fabianism as her guiding force at Cambridge; thereby substituting the doctrine shaped by Shaw (and the Webbs) for any familial precepts introduced in her isolated, and to some level denied a childhood.

To avoid her father's anger, Fanny disguises her identity as a playwright when she asks the critic, Trotter* to cover for the play if her father seems upset, by telling him that “*its style and construction.... are considered as the very highest art nowadays; that the author wrote it in the proper way for repertory theatres of the most superior kind*” (365). Trotter refused and made a number of attempts to avoid putting himself in this situation. In Trotter’s resistance Shaw finds the opportunity to poke fun at contemporary criticism of his plays and intentionally establishes the clear association of Fanny’s new form of dramaturgy to his own:

“I am aware that one author, who is, I blush to say, a personal friend of mine, resorts freely to the dastardly subterfuge of calling them

Conversations, discussions, and so forth, with the express object of evading criticism. But I am not to be disarmed by such tricks. I say they are not plays. Dialogue, if you will. Exhibitions of character, perhaps: especially the character of the author. Fiction, possibly, though a little decent reticence as to introducing actual persons, and thus violating the sanctity of private life, might not be amiss. But plays, no.. I say NO. Not plays” (365-366).

However, the disgust and discomfort with the younger generation and its advanced views are shown very clearly in the play by Trotter. When Fanny starts discussing the attitudes towards the modern stage she shares with her fellow Cambridge University Fabians, Trotter exclaims,

-- And now let me warn you. If you’re going to be a charming healthy young English girl, you may coax me. If you’re going to be unsexed Cambridge Fabian virago, I’ll treat you as my intellectual equal, as I would treat a man. (364)

Shaw foregrounds the irony of Trotter’s conventional views of women here, that only when they are “*unsexed*” – no longer women—can he debate with them on an equal level, which Trotter perceives as a threat to Fanny, but which is actually a threat to his masculine security. And here once more the question of gender identity is raised.

The tension between them invites to mind the conflict presented in *The Philanderer*, (1893) where the issue of gender identity, depicted by the characterisation of the extremely womanly Julia Carven, Her masculine caricatured Sister Sylvia, and the mere moderately male-identified New Woman Grace Tranfield, puts in question Shaw’s stance on the potential for combinations of female intellect and femininity.

Trotter’s observation after watching the play was: “*Any clever modern girl could turn out that kind of thing by the yard*” (434). This remark shows not only his denial of the performance but also indicates a dramatic irony, while his fellow critics speculate on whether Shaw might be the author, just to lead the audience to the controlling hand of Shaw on *Fanny’s play*. When Fanny reveals her identity, that is to say, the truth of Fanny's authorship comes out, she shows her objection at their comparisons: “*Oh, of course it would be a little like Bernard Shaw. The Fabian touch, you know*” (440).

It is quite observable that all of *Fanny’s play* is Shaw’s creation as the play-within-the-play sparkles with typically Shavian wit and concerns for such issues as cross-class marriage and the forcible feeding of suffragettes. (See *Pygmalion* for a depiction of the difficulties of cross-class relationships and “Torture by Forcible Feeding Is Illegal”(R. Weintraub, *Fabian Feminist* 228-235).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The point that is intended to be made here is that Shaw nurses both his young female protégée and the play which she ostensibly creates in attempts to prove male domination and supremacy. He creates a literary female who exemplifies growing up to be just like himself figure by having her write a play remarkably similar to his own, thereby actually becoming Shaw himself through the literary nursing which generated both the frame and the interior play.

Evidently, Shaw projects a female persona growing into, and fusing with, his own maturing capabilities as a playwright, encapsulating the motif of the male playwright bringing up the female playwright to be not only male/playwright-identified but actually becoming the male playwright himself.

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